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ABSTRACT

The 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), surveyed nationally representative samples of public and private school teachers and asked them about their work-related time commitments at the school site and away from the site. Items from this survey, together with comparable items from the 1987-88 SASS, provide a picture of how much time teachers spend in teaching and teaching-related activities. In 1990-91, teaching required just about 46 hours of work each week. About 11 of these hours each week were spent by teachers outside their schools in school-related activities, either interacting with students or working on their own. Such a workload indicates a need for more research on teachers' use of time and the implications of alternative time-use strategies for implementation of professional standards and educational reform activities. (MLF)

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ISSUE BRIEF

How Much Time Do Public and Private School Teachers Spend in Their Work?

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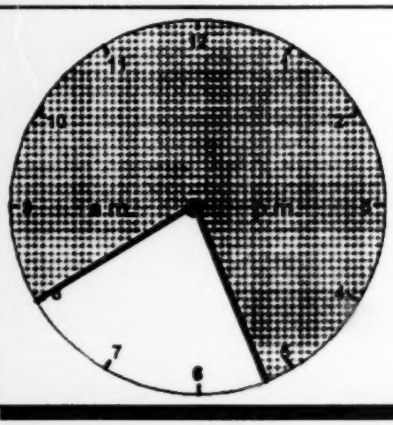
Ongoing debates about the professional status of teachers, the costs associated with staffing educational programs, and extending instructional time in schools can be informed by consideration of how much time teachers spend in activities related to their work. As with most jobs, teachers' work does not end each day with the drive home from the worksite. In fact, teachers may be more likely than workers in other professions to spend time away from their schools in work-related activities—e.g., traveling with students, reviewing homework, and preparing lessons. The 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), surveyed nationally representative samples of public and private school teachers and asked them about their work-related time commitments at the school site and away from the site. Items from this survey, together with comparable items from the 1987-88 SASS, provide a picture of how much time teachers spend in teaching and teaching-related activities.

In 1990-91, teachers worked more than a 40-hour week.

The combination of in-school and outside-school hours spent by teachers on a weekly basis in work-related activities in 1990-91 added up to more than a 40-hour work week—i.e., 46.3 hours for public school teachers, and 45.7 hours for private school teachers. Dividing the total hours reported by public school teachers by five days produces an estimate of about 9.25 hours per day—shown on the clock below as exceeding a 9-to-5 work day.



Estimated time each day teachers spend in activities related to their teaching assignments.

Public school teachers were required to be at school for about 35 hours during a full week in 1990-91.

The 1990-91 SASS asked teachers the following question: "How many hours were you required to be at this school during your most recent full week of teaching?" Their responses, averaged separately for public school and private school teachers, indicate that teachers in public schools spent almost two hours more per week at their schools than did their private school counterparts (table 1). Adding in the 11 to 12 hours *outside* of school these teachers reported spending in school-related activities during a recent full week of teaching in 1990-91, however, closes the gap between these two groups in total time commitments to school-related activities each week.

Public school teachers spent approximately 11 hours each week outside of school in activities related to their teaching assignments in 1990-91.

From 1987-88 to 1990-91, the total hours public school teachers reported spending during a full week of teaching in school-related activities outside of school increased by about 1.6 hours (table 2). For private school teachers over this same period, the increase in outside-school time commitments to school activities amounted to about 2.5 hours each week for a full week of teaching.

In particular, for public school teachers there was an increase of about 1 hour each week from 1987-88 to 1990-91 in outside-school activities without students that were related to school matters (e.g., preparation, grading papers, parent conferences). For private school teachers, the outside-school hours spent both in school-related activities with students (e.g., coaching or tutoring students) and activities without students (e.g., attending school

Table 1. Average hours each week that teachers were required to be at school during their most recent full week of teaching, 1990-91

Public school teachers	35.3 hours
Private school teachers	33.5 hours

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990-91 (Teacher Questionnaire).

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Table 2. Average hours each week that teachers spent outside regular school hours in school-related activities, 1990-91

	In activities *with* students	In activities *without* students
Public school teachers		
1987-88	2.6 hours	6.8 hours
1990-91	3.1 hours	7.9 hours
Private school teachers		
1987-88	2.4 hours	7.3 hours
1990-91	3.6 hours	8.6 hours

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990-91 (Teacher Questionnaire).

meetings or lesson preparation) increased by more than 1 hour each week over this period.

In 1990-91, public secondary school teachers taught an average of 5 periods each day, with an average class size of 23 students.

A sense of what may lead some teachers to spend greater numbers of work hours outside school is given by considering the amount of preparation that may be required of secondary school teachers (e.g., English, mathematics). In 1990-91, these teachers in public schools taught an average of almost 5 periods each day and interacted with a total of approximately 115 students in all of their classes (table 3). Private secondary school teachers were faced with almost the same number of periods each day and a total of approximately 90 students in all of their classes. When different periods mean teaching different subject matters, it is easy to see how the needs for preparation time increase. Even when different periods do not mean different subjects, teachers who interact with 90 to over 100 students each day may still face the formidable task of accommodating a wide range of student abilities in their subject-matter presentations.

Discussion

In 1990-91, teaching required just about 46 hours of work each week. About one-quarter of these hours each week were spent by teachers outside their schools in school-related activities, either interacting with students or working on their own. With this sort of workload, there is a real need for more research on teachers' use of time and the implications of alternative time-use strategies for implementation of professional standards and educational reform activities. Several authors, for example, have noted recently that time (or the lack of time) is one of the most difficult problems facing schools as they seek to respond to challenges posed by the National Education Goals (Donahoe, 1993; Watts and Castle, 1993; Canady and Rettig, 1993).

Table 3. Average number of periods taught each day by teachers in departments and average class size, 1990-91

	Periods/day	Average class size
Public school teachers	4.9	23.1 students
Private school teachers	4.6	19.6 students

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990-91 (Teacher Questionnaire).

Japanese teachers work a 240-day school year, about 60 days longer than the typical U.S. public school year, but they have been reported to spend only 60 percent of their day in the classroom and the rest of their time preparing lessons and planning with colleagues (Sato and McLaughlin, 1992). In comparison, teachers in the U.S. typically work a nine-month schedule of 46-hour weeks and may need to use their summer days to engage in professional development activities or in activities related to school-centered reform initiatives.

Are U.S. teachers who devote more hours of outside-school time to their work more dedicated to the profession or are they more likely to "burn out" and leave? Is the time burden of teaching affecting teacher attitudes about students and about their colleagues? SASS data can be an important source for addressing these and other questions related to teachers' use of time.

Reference:

Canady, R.L., & Rettig, M.D. (December 1993). Unlocking the lockstep high school schedule. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(4), 310-314.

Donahoe, T. (December 1993). Finding the way: Structure, time, and culture in school improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(4), 298-305.

Sato, N., & McLaughlin, M.W. (January 1992). Context matters: Teaching in Japan and in the United States. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73*(5), 359-366.

Watts, G.D., & Castle, S. (December 1993). The time dilemma in school restructuring. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(4), 306-309.

For more information, see the following publication:

Choy, S.P., Henke, R.R., Alt, M.N., Medrich, E.A., & Bobbitt, S.A. (1993). *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1990-91*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (NCES 93-146).

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This Issue Brief was prepared by Robert Rossi, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this Issue Brief, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219-1330. To order additional copies of this Issue Brief or other NCES publications, call 1-800-424-1616.

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